

truly blessed. And just as you have been blessed, you have also blessed others. I've been told that "to those to whom much is given, much is expected in return."

The Millers have been fortunate to have a great family, great children, great grandchildren, friends and relatives. Their children, grandchildren, other relatives and friends have been fortunate to have the Millers in their lives. And I wish all of them a great day as they gather for a tremendous celebration on Sunday.

And so I close my comments, Mr. Speaker, with congratulations to Tom and Lois Miller, wish them well and trust that they will have many more years of happy and blissful marriage and that this relationship will continue until the end of time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. JONES of North Carolina addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

□ 1400

EDUCATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. GARRETT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor this evening to bring information before this body about the current status of education in our Nation.

I had the distinct pleasure of speaking before the Committee on Education recently during Members Day regarding No Child Left Behind, NCLB, and its reauthorization. But I felt compelled to come to the floor as well to join with my other colleagues and reiterate my concern with the current state of education in this country and what I hope to see come out of this year's reauthorization.

Now, I share with all my colleagues here in Congress the ultimate goal of providing a high-quality education for every child in America.

Surely, we can do better than what has been done so far. What, then, should we do? I have looked at past reauthorizations of ESEA, and I noticed a troubling trend. With every reauthorization, now problems are identified with American schools. With every reauthorization, the solution proposed by Congress is for the Federal Government to become more involved with education.

So, with this reauthorization before us, I have to ask, what has this interference wrought? Back in 1983, a famous report entitled "A Nation At Risk" said that America had fallen dangerously behind the rest of the world in education. Today new studies say many of the exact same things.

According to the National Center For Education statistics, for example, in 2003, U.S. fourth graders were outperformed by their peers in 11 countries, including four Asian countries and seven European countries. U.S. eighth graders were outperformed by their peers in nine countries. Yet, as a percentage of GDP, we spend more money now on education than at any time in our Nation's history. In fact, we spend more in the United States on K through 12 education than the Philippines, Saudi Arabia or Sweden spend on everything in their countries.

Our problem is this: We have increased Federal paperwork which requires increased taxpayer dollars to pay for increased administrative staff. But we have decreased teacher flexibility. We have decreased accountability to parents and decreased student performance.

So for this year's reauthorization, I am proposing something different. Very soon, I will be dropping in legislation that will allow a State to in essence opt out of the majority of the requirements of NCLB, but at the same time, allow those taxpayers in the States to keep their education funding through what we call a refundable tax credit.

I understand this is very different than what some other Members were proposing. But I feel that only by allowing the States and local governments to bear the burden of education accountability, accountability on that level, will we ever, as a Nation, make the progress that we need to make in the classroom so that we can stay competitive in the twenty-first century.

I recently held a town hall meeting back in my district about No Child Left Behind. Every person in that room had something negative to say about the administrative requirements in the program in general. At one point in the meeting, I asked how many people there had contacted and met with a local teacher or principal or school board member regarding their problems? Nearly everyone in the room raised their hand.

I then asked the question, how many of the people in the room here met with somebody in the State capital or in the New Jersey Department of Education about their concerns? About half the people raised their hands. I then asked, well, how many of you have had contact with someone from the U.S. Department of Education in Washington? Only one person raised their hand.

My point is this: By transferring the requirements for NCLB in Washington, we are moving the accountability for education further away from the parents, the teachers, the school boards, to where it belongs. It belongs close to the parents, the students and the educators in the local school boards.

In addition, the reporting requirements under NCLB have created basically a confusing system, a system that ends up punishing our best

schools. One of the high schools in my district is consistently cited in publications in the State as one of the top-performing schools in my State. This very same school was placed on an early warning list 2 years after NCLB was instituted.

This was not an underperforming school. Every year, nearly 100 percent of the kids graduate and they attend college. The average combined SAT score for the students in that school was around 1,100. Fourteen AP courses and tests were offered and so on. So it is a great school. And, yes, it is on the warning list.

So I worry that while trying to meet the requirements of NCLB, students attending this high school will actually be held back by burdensome regulations rather than pushed to excel at already high standards that the school had previously set for them.

I am certain there are many other schools in my counties in my district in my State and across the country, which is why we need a change to NCLB.

CALLING FOR A TIMETABLE TO REDEPLOY FROM IRAQ

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. SESTAK) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SESTAK. Mr. Speaker, a little over 5 years ago I was on the ground in Afghanistan and then returned with an Aircraft Carrier Battle Group. I then took that Aircraft Carrier Battle Group into the Persian Gulf for the precursor operations just before we began that war.

After that war had commenced, I returned to the ground in Afghanistan 18 months later for a short period of time and saw what had not been done. We had accomplished so little compared to what might have been because we diverted our attention and our resources from our Civil Affairs Forces to our Special Operations Forces to the tragic misadventure in Iraq.

I speak of Afghanistan because as it becomes prey to terrorists and as the Taliban has moved back into the southern provinces, it is a poster child for why I believe we must bring about a timetable for the end of the war in Iraq.

That war has hurt U.S. security throughout this globe as well as here at home, yet not one Army unit, Active, Reserve or Guard is in a state of readiness that it could deploy anywhere in the world if another contingency were to occur. Never mind that we are failing to engage properly from the Western Pacific to Southeast Asia to the Middle East.

There is a change in our strategy that can bring about an end to this tragedy without a failed state in Iraq. That is to set a date that is certain by which we would redeploy out of Iraq, because a date certain changes the structure of incentives within that region to change the behavior of other